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### Echo CONTACTS

■ Editor: MARTIN MCNEILL  
01268 468373 martin.mcneill@nqe.com  
■ Deputy editor: SARA TAYLOR  
01268 468389 sara.taylor@nqe.com  
■ Assistant editor: CHRIS HATTON  
01268 468345 chris.hatton@nqe.com  
■ Picture editor: NICK ANSELL  
01268 468380 nick.ansell@nqe.com  
■ Sports editor: PAUL ALTON  
01268 468389 paul.alton@nqe.com  
■ Features: 01268 468389

### Echo NEWSDESKS

■ SOUTHEND 01702 321151  
■ BASILDON 01268 468389  
■ CASTLE POINT 01702 321147  
■ E-MAIL: echo.news@nqe.com  
■ FAX: 01268 468281/01702 321157  
■ PICTURES: echopix@nqe.com

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RESIDENTS today spoke of their horror at learning a huge traveller site could be built on their doorstep.

Jim Killick, chairman of the Chestnut Road Residents Association, said: "We will do whatever it takes to prevent this happening."

"We will campaign, lobby and protest. We have recently turned this estate around."

"We simply won't tolerate this."

"We had travellers move in there once before and it was nothing but grief. There was flytipping, vandalism and cars were set on fire."

Bunty Murtagh, 63, Neighbourhood Watch coordinator for the estate, said: "They can't do it. We have done so much to improve this estate."

■ By JON AUSTIN

Political reporter

Anyone would be welcome if they were good neighbours, but we know that a lot of them are not. The estate will not tolerate this."

Billericay and District MP John Baron attacked the proposals.

The Tory, whose constituency includes Pitsea, said: "This proves the Government is panicking and knows its decision to give the travellers two years to leave was wrong."

"It would set a dangerous precedent by rewarding anyone who broke planning laws with a site."

"It would be unfair to the 4,500 people on Basildon's housing register who are rightly waiting their place in the queue and because the area is earmarked for industry it would be deny-



■ Unsuitable site - Malcolm Buckley

ing job opportunities."

Council leader Malcolm Buckley branded Terminus Drive "unfit for human habitation".

He said the choice of land was "unsuitable".

Basildon Labour leader Nigel Smith raised doubts about the size and location.

He added: "I do have very serious concerns about the site. It would be massive."



■ On the attack - John Baron MP

"I had hoped they would be looking at smaller sites and not necessarily all within the district."

Lib Dem leader Geoff Williams was more positive. "My initial reaction is it seems a constructive suggestion from the Government."

"Any measure which avoids the trauma of eviction must be explored."

ellers."

The site is earmarked to take millions of tonnes of soil from the proposed Crossrail development.

## The site in the spotlight

SANDWICHED between the A13 flyover and Tilbury Loop railway line, Terminus Drive is an 8.5 acre brownfield site owned largely by regeneration agency English Partnerships (EP).

It is less than a mile from Pitsea landfill site, an Anglian Water sewage works and Tesco Extra.

It is potentially worth around £8million as it is allocated for employment.

The Government has suggested three options - transferring it to Basildon Council to lease to travellers, selling to the travellers, or EP keeping it to lease to travellers.

# Travellers focused despite surprise

TRAVELLERS fighting eviction from Dale Farm today expressed shock at plans to move their site.

However, they insisted they were focusing on a High Court battle surrounding their existing site at Crays Hill.

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) was due to be told today if it can join them to challenge Basildon Council's decision to clear the site.

At London's High Court the commission will argue the council decision was racist.

Dale Farm leader Richard Sheridan said he would be keen to view Terminus Drive, but added: "All we can do at the moment is focus on this court hearing - our

homes are at stake."

Campaigner Gratton Puxon said: "The yard owners want to give careful consideration to this idea, but at the moment are pinning their hope on a successful planning appeal to be heard in February."

"They would much prefer to get planning permission for Dale Farm where they made significant investment."

"However, there are families who do not own yards there who would be interested to look."

Mr Sheridan has previously accused Basildon Council of providing no legal sites of its own in the district.

Basildon has 104 legal pitches - the fourth highest number of any



■ Focus - Richard Sheridan

authority in the country. It also has the highest number of illegal sites.

But Mr Sheridan said: "This is always used as an argument for not letting us stay."

"But what they forget



■ Interested - Gratton Puxon

to say is that 24 of those were provided by Essex County Council and the other 80 are private plots provided by travellers.

Basildon Council has not actually provided one single pitch.

"Since the Conservatives took away the duty of councils to provide sites in 1994, travellers have been encouraged to make their own and that is what we have done."

"More than 120 houses are going to be allowed to be built on green belt in Essex, so what is so different about us having land in the green belt?"

"The Government has made £56million available to councils to make or improve sites, so why doesn't the council apply for some of that instead of spending £2million of its own money having us evicted from our own land?"

"Then it can say it has provided sites."

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